

Winter 2020

Historical Journal



LITITZ HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

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History of Trap Manufacturing Hiding in Plain Sight

By Michelle Caron

As the weather turns from brisk to sharp, enjoy a stroll through lovely Lititz. If your path takes you past the downtown shops decked out for Christmas and along Lititz Run, the pulse of the town since 1756, you may find yourself at the corner of North Locust Street and Front Street. This corner could be a snapshot of the town itself: Charming homes, greenspace and the Woodstream manufacturing facility sharing a cozy footprint. Take a moment to gaze at the rectangular brick building on the corner.

And be sure to look up.

Your eyes will find six enigmatic sculptured panels sandwiched between nondescript windows. These Art Deco panels are an unusual architectural feature in Lititz, with only a few other buildings still standing that boast the geometric patterns and strong vertical lines distinctive of this style. The panels tell the story of human ingenuity wrapped in American business acumen that would make any modern business proud.



The panels present the evolution of man's need to establish his control of the animal kingdom. The first panel features a hapless nudist streaking through the jungle closely pursued by a stegosaurus. In the second panel our clothes-averse hero boldly defends himself with a steely glare and strong swings of a club while avoiding the lethal claws of a saber-toothed cat.

In panel three, tall ginkgo biloba trees stand watch as an Oneida Indian lets an arrow fly against an approaching bear. The fourth panel leaves interpretation to the observer. A proud bull seems to defend its ground from barking dogs, or perhaps fight for its life from attacking wolves. Humans return in the fifth panel: a blacksmith with a Joe Magarac physique creates a steel animal trap on an anvil as a pair of Oneida men look on. The trap features a small "v" in its strike plate. The final panel is the culmination of all the previous scenes of toil.

Continued on page 3 inside. Above: One of several panels on the current Woodstream office building in Lititz.

A Season Like No Other

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I wanted to take this opportunity to graciously extend a sincere thank you to our tour guides, museum coordinator, volunteers, and board members for weathering through this very tough season.

Last Spring so many things were uncertain, but after careful consideration, we decided to open our buildings and gift shop on July 1st, not knowing what to expect.

With safety precautions in place including masks, hand sanitizer, a plastic shield at the desk, as well as one-way directional tape on the floor, we were able to give tours as well as operate our Lititz Museum and Gift Shop both carefully and safely.

I can't thank everyone enough for their perseverance as well as their willingness to adapt to this very crazy time.

As we finish out this year, we look to our 2021 season with the hope of a lot more normalcy. In the meantime, please continue to be safe and healthy.

Have a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!



Photo above courtesy of Donald Reese

History of Trap Manufacturing Hiding in Plain Sight Con't:

Four hunters stand in a circle. All wear sports coats, button down shirts, pants, boots and oilskin hats. Three hold rifles casually, and the leader proudly displays his prize: a dead coyote. A steel animal trap is prominently featured in the lower center—the “V” impossible to miss. That same “V” adorns a circular seal over the Front Street entrance and represents one of the factory’s most famous creations: the Victor mousetrap. The dates on the seal — 1848 and 1929 — mark two decisive periods in the manufacturer’s history.

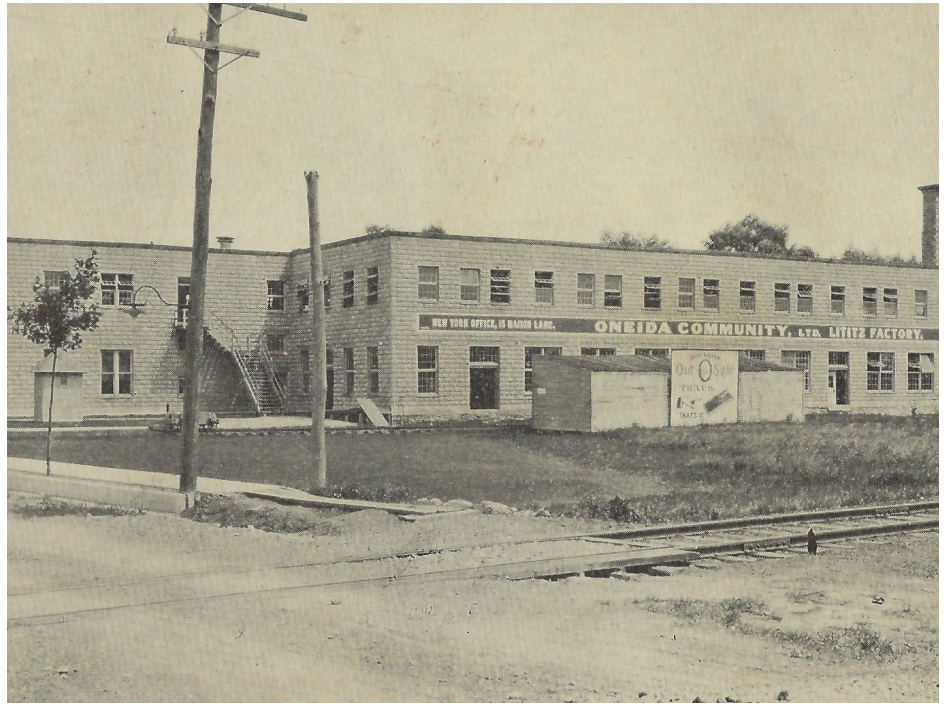
In the mid 1800’s, upstate New York was still a heavily wooded frontier and proved irresistible to the settlers moving from eastern New York and other parts of New England. They found available space in the absence of the Oneida Indians, who had officially joined the side of the rebels during the American Revolutionary War but had been removed and relocated to Wisconsin in the creation of the post-war United States of America. One of these settlers was Sewell Newhouse, a young man passionate about the outdoors, sporting a gift for mechanical design and capitalizing on his understanding of how steel behaved in the cold New York winters. By 1842, he was regionally known for creating superior sprung steel traps.

Fate arrived in 1848. A unique congregation of people arrived in Oneida from Vermont, seeking to settle and escape from the confining religious and social rules of eastern New England. The group would become known as the Oneida Community, a utopian religious-based Perfectionist society founded by John Humphrey Noyes.

Newhouse was drawn to the Community’s practical and hard-working nature, and the young man’s skill with metal and plentiful trading connections in the area were an appeal to the new settlers.

When an order came to Newhouse for 500 traps, he forged a deal with the Community members in which they would help with production and he would become a member of the Community. Soon requests outstripped the ability of a few men to create enough traps to meet demand, so the Community began building factories and inventing machines to stamp, bend and cast the various parts needed to fuel the exploding trap industry.

Newell designed more types of traps, specific to species or need. Additional factories and production machines were designed and built to accommodate these new products, and salesmen were sent out with two trunks each filled with traps to drum up more business. By 1860, the Oneida Community was getting orders for \$1,000 worth of traps at a time (roughly \$31,360 in 2020). Business was booming!



An early postcard view of the Animal Trap Company of Lititz. Story concludes on page 4

History of Trap Manufacturing Hiding in Plain Sight Concluded:

Steel traps were big business in other parts of the country as well. The 1890s saw competition between two companies: the Animal Trap Company of Abington, IL and J.M. Mast Manufacturing of Lititz, PA, with the battleground being over the patents each company held. The dispute was settled in classic American business fashion: the Oneida Community purchased and absorbed both companies in 1906-1907 along with their patents. They maintained the Lititz manufacturing facility, well suited as it was along the railroad tracks.

Soon, however, it became clear that the Oneida Community's other metals-based business venture would eclipse animal traps. Dining silverware ("jewelry for your dining table") became such a huge industry for the Community, that in 1924-1925 they sold the trap company and all its patents to three leading Community members. This sale triggered a construction boom on the corner of North Locust and Front and a name change: The Animal Trap Company of America.

This history of invention and business brings us back to the present corner of North Locust and Front, and the unassuming Art Deco building with the fantastical panels. Documents point to local architect Henry Yeagley Shaub as the master of this design which was erected in 1929-1930. Shaub was a Lancaster, PA native and a Franklin and Marshall graduate. The highlights of his work include the Manheim Township High School (now the Neff Elementary School) (1928), Shaub Store and Office Building (Lancaster, 1929), and the Lancaster County National Bank (1936). Shaub was known for bringing touches of art into the details of his work. He focused not only on the variety and beauty of individual designs, but also the building's purpose: the needed light, acoustics, room proportions and layout. A motto was discovered on his office wall: "The thing that goes farthest in making life worthwhile, that costs the least and does the most, is just a pleasant smile."

It is not known if Shaub was commissioned to design the six panels on the Animal Trap Company building specifically or if they are simply the outpouring of his creative sensibilities. The panels have faced North Locust and Front Streets for ninety years, their carved lines still crisp and their style impervious to malleable architectural fashion. Though four panels hide behind trees for most of the year, the winter season reveals the story they tell all year round. All we need to do to enjoy is go for a stroll. And be sure to look up.

Right: 1943 photo of the Animal Trap Company during an awards ceremony



WOW! What a night!

A BIG thanks to each and every one of you who made a monetary donation to us on November 20th during the annual Extraordinary Give. Because of your generosity, we were able to raise \$6,280 for our organization. On top of that, we were very lucky to receive one of the “Golden Ticket” prizes, which added another \$500 to our final amount. This season has been very tough for us, and we can’t thank you enough for your generosity.

THANKS AGAIN!



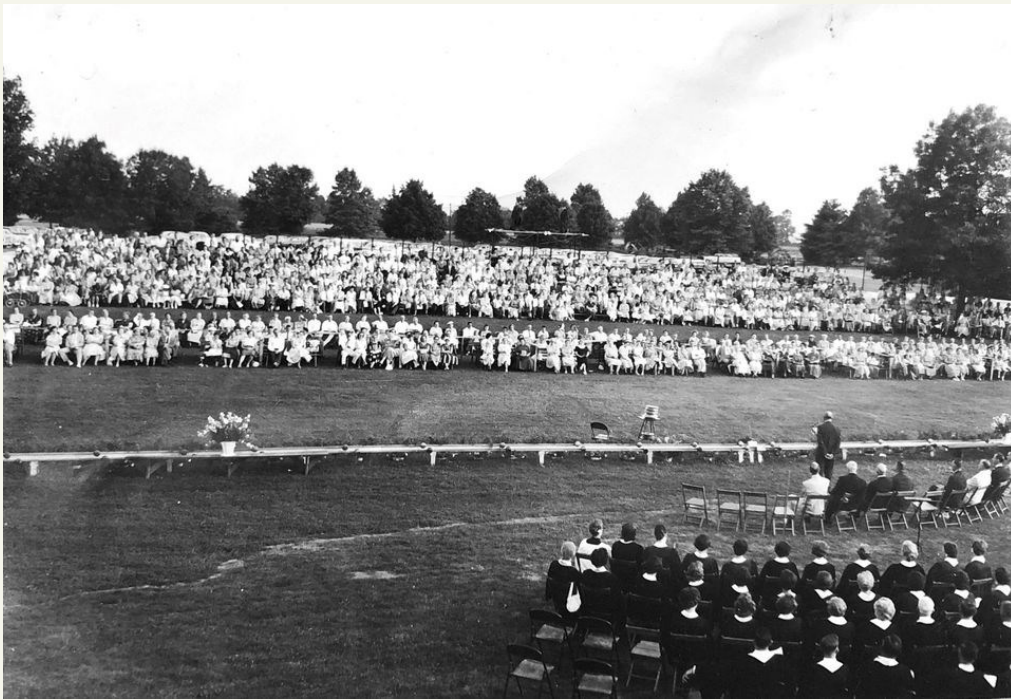
Upcoming Safe & Socially-Distanced Holiday Events

Annual Carol Sing

Join the Lititz Historical Foundation in conjunction with the Lititz Moravian Archives on Thursday, December 10th for the annual Community Christmas Carol Sing at Lititz Moravian Church Square. The event will begin at 7pm. This is a free outdoor event, but attendees must wear masks and social distance. There is plenty of room to spread out at Church Square. Attendance will be capped at 200 persons, maximum. The Moravian Trombone Choir will be on hand as you, your friends, neighbors, and family will sing holiday classics.

Annual Christmas Candlelight Tour

The next evening, on December 11th, the Lititz Historical Foundation will hold its Annual Christmas Candlelight Tour. Accompanied by a socially-distanced tour guide, guests will receive a 40-minute tour of the 1792 Johannes Mueller House, and will learn the story of Mueller and his family, as well as history and customs of the early Moravian community of Lititz during the 18th century. Guests must pre-register. Cost is five dollars per person. Groups are limited to six persons, maximum. Tours will take place every 20 minutes, beginning at 5pm; with the last tour beginning at 8:20pm. Please arrive 10 minutes before your tour timeslot. Charge by phone by calling the Lititz Historical Foundation at 717-627-4636 or stop into their museum and gift shop on Fridays or Saturdays between 11am-5pm. Minimum credit card charge for phone orders is \$10. First come, first served. Paid tickets may be picked up on the evening of the tour.



This group of approximately 400 local residents took part in a special program in 1956 entitled “Our Wonderous Land.” The musical presentation, which highlighted many of the historical elements that made Lititz famous, was one of the highlights of Lititz’s 200th bicentennial celebration that year.

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